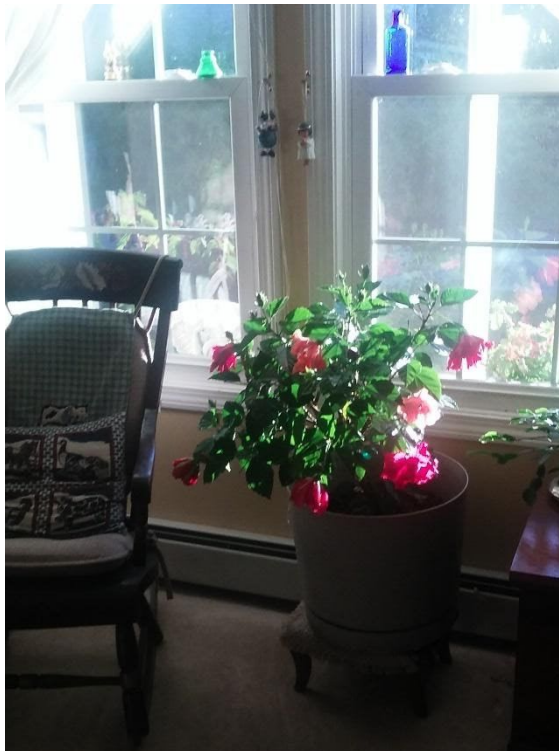


# **WORSHIPPING AT HOME**

*with UCC Westerly  
during the Covid-19 outbreak*

**March 29, 2020**

- Create a small worship space in your home anywhere. Add a candle, a bible and perhaps a small vase of flowers or a plant. Be sure to leave a place for Jesus! (See *At Home Worship Instructions!*)



□ At 9:30am, the time we would usually gather in our sanctuary, settle into your worship space and begin...

□ A reminder I will be livestreaming an abbreviated worship service on Facebook Live for about 25 -35 minutes beginning at 9:45am. Let me know if you need help to set up a Facebook account.

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**Light your candle as a reminder of God's presence with you**

**Gathering song:** "Sisters, Brothers" (a chant by Maria Harris)

*"Sisters, brothers, take your time, go slowly. Listen deep inside yourself. Every hour is holy."*

## **Call to Worship adapted from Psalm 145:**

The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.  
The Lord upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down.  
The Lord is near to all who call, to all who call upon the Lord in truth.

## **Opening Song: "God Will Take Care of You"**

*Be not dismayed whate'er betide, God will take care of you;  
Beneath his wings of love abide; God will take care of you.*

Refrain: *God will take care of you, through every day, o'er all the way.  
God will take care of you, God will take care of you.*

*No matter what may be the test, God will take care of you;  
Lean, weary one, upon his breast, God will take care of you.*

Refrain

**PRAYER OF SELF REFLECTION:** *The Prayer of St. John Chrysostom, 5<sup>th</sup> century*  
**Almighty God, you have given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplication to you; and you have promised through your well-beloved Son that when two or three are gathered together in his name, you will be in the midst of them. Fulfill now, O Lord, our desires and petitions as may be best for us; granting us in this world knowledge of your truth, and in the age to come life everlasting. Amen.**

**TODAY'S SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 21:28-32

Message:

*“What do you think?”*

Rev. Ruth

What do you think? This is almost always a loaded question. It's a loaded question because you can never know for sure if the person asking you really wants to know what *you* think OR are they hoping you will agree with them on whatever it is you are discussing or doing in the moment. For instance, many and many a husband cringe when asked this question by his spouse in regard to anything from a new hairstyle to a new recipe his spouse is experimenting with. Am I supposed to rave about it OR, if I get vibes this is not the hoped for result with either the hair or the meal, do I fumble through the situation with a carefully calculated response like, “well, what do *YOU* think?” Right? Are you with me? Have you had this experience with someone and found yourself wishing fervently you were anywhere but in front of this person who is obviously waiting for your answer? Of course you have.

“What do you think” is indeed a load question, weighted down with unknown expectations of what the person is hoping will be your answer. Unless, of course, the person you are asking has a whale of an ego. Then they are probably thinking how smart you are to ask them what they think so they can dazzle you with their obviously perfect answer. This is exactly the situation Jesus was in as he posed this question to a group of temple officials – the chief priests and the elders specifically – just before he told them a parable. He had been arguing with them for a while before he posed this question. They had been challenging his authority as a teacher or rabbi in the temple, no doubt because what he was teaching the people was so radically different from what they were used to hearing. These religious officials were confident they knew exactly what God wanted them to know, to learn and to do every moment of every day. They had studied all their lives so they *knew* what was right and what was wrong when it came to worshipping God, to teaching people about God. They were therefore very sincere as they asked Jesus, “by what authority are you doing these things and who gave you this authority?” Jesus responds to them with another question and they know he has them trapped in an argument they can't win, so they admit they don't know the answer. This was an argument about John the Baptist, by the way. Jesus wanted them to tell him if John's baptisms were from heaven or from human authority? They knew if they answered “from heaven,” then Jesus would ask them why they didn't believe him

and if they answered of human origin, the people would be furious because they regarded John as a prophet. So, they told Jesus they didn't know.

In response he tells them what is known as the Parable of the Two Sons, which we read today. Perhaps now it is easier to understand why it is that Jesus begins the parable with the question, "what do you think?" Again, he had their stomachs in knots. And that was exactly what Jesus intended. He wanted them off balance. He wanted them to have to think carefully before they answered him. And, he wanted them to know that he knew they were uncomfortable with his question. The parable itself is pretty simple. A father has two sons. He asks the first son to go and work in the family vineyard. This son initially refuses to go, but in the end, he does go and do as his father asks. Then the father asks the second son to go and work in the vineyard and the second son says he will go but doesn't. And we're back to Jesus' question. "What do you think? ... Which of the two sons did as the father asked?" The first, they answer.

This is where it gets interesting because Jesus doesn't say, "you're right." He doesn't ask them to explain their answer. Instead, he berates them: "Truly I tell you the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going in to the kingdom of heaven ahead of you." Yikes! In that time and place this would have been a huge insult to these temple officials. Jesus told them the worst sinners would be received into God's presence before they would. This was even though they got the answer to his question correct! It *was* the first son who did as the father asked. Why? Because he did what the father asked! He said he would not, then thought better of that answer and did as he was asked. The second son said he would go and work, but he never did. So, what is Jesus' point here? Pretty simple actually. Jesus was telling the religious authorities, who were presumably the people most knowledgeable about matters of faith and God, that actions matter more than words. What you do as a person of faith matters more than what you say. Even if you are saying all the right things, but the words are not backed up by right action, the words are meaningless. Even if you say all the right prayers, perform all the right rituals, do everything exactly as prescribed, what matters to God is only how you act. What matters to God is only how your faith informs the person you are and the way you live your life.

What do you think? Always a loaded question and never more so than now, in this season of the valley of Covid-19. We watch the news and hear the medical professionals and the epidemiologists responding to this question "what do you think" one way, and some government leaders seeming to respond in another. We hear stories of others offering their own opinions on the situation when nobody asked them but they want to shout it out anyway. In this past week we've watched infection rates climb here and around the world and heard about ever increasing shortages of critical supplies. We've experienced ourselves the shortages in the grocery stores of such simple items as toilet paper and hand-sanitizer and pasta all because a few people chose to answer the question "what do you think" with a selfish response – I think I should get mine and I just won't think about anyone else. We've seen people answer this question "what do you think" when nobody asked them, especially when it comes to sheltering in place as

opposed to heading up to the communities where their summer homes are and infection rates are low. Absolutely no one asked them, “what do you think” about needing to run instead of staying where you are to slow the rate of infection. But they answered it anyway, and in a very self-centered way. Well, I think if I pay taxes on this summer property I should be able to live there any time I want. I decide where I live and when I live there. Not the governor or the mayor or anyone else. I think I am allowed to do whatever I want because I have the resources to do whatever I want. After all, I’m a good person. I donate to all the right charities. I pay my taxes. I run a successful business and I have the rewards of all that. So, why shouldn’t I be able to use all those resources to do something I think will better protect myself and the people I love?

Well, that least is an understandable sentiment. If you have the resources to escape from New York City which is rapidly being overwhelmed by the pandemic, why shouldn’t you? That is a legitimate question. And it brings us right back to Jesus’ question, but from a slightly different angle. “What do you think” is not always a question about what would be best for you personally. Sometimes it is, certainly. Like, what do you think would be the best job for you or what do you think is the best bank to deal with or the best car to buy, given your unique circumstances. Of course! Yes! But what we are living through now is not a time when you come first and that’s what I think some folks are struggling with so mightily. No, it’s not about whether you think you have enough toilet paper to last until the Second Coming. No, it’s not about whether you should buy more hand-sanitizer, just in case. No, it’s not about fleeing from an area you chose to make your primary residence because this pandemic is coming way too close to you personally. And there it is right there. This entire Covid-19 situation is not about you. It’s not just about you. It’s about everyone together and what each of us needs to do to keep everyone as safe as possible, including you but not only you.

So, I invite you in the days and weeks ahead to hold on to this question with a twist. Instead of imagining someone else is asking you, “what do you think” you should be doing for yourself right now, ask the question as Jesus would want you to. Take your question to someone who just might need to hear an encouraging word, who just might need some help with getting some food or some toilet paper or whatever, who just might need to feel someone is thinking about them in the midst of this very scary and overwhelming situation and ask them: What do you think about how I might help you? What do you think we might do together to help some folks who really need it? What do you think about sewing some face masks? What do you think about making some phone calls or sending some cards to folks who just cannot risk leaving their homes even for a minute? What do you think about making a difference for someone else?

Dear friends, take this question into the week ahead with you. Allow yourselves to see this question as one from Jesus serving as your guide for moving forward through these uncertain days. What do you think you can do to make a difference for someone else? That is the question these days. And we know from today’s parable that Jesus is looking for the right answer. From you and from me. So, I gotta ask – what do you think right here and right now? Seriously... Amen.

### **A Time of Prayer**

- If you are joining in the prayers during the Facebook Live broadcast, before worship take a few minutes to jot down your own list of prayer concerns. Send them to me via comments as we approach this time in the service.
- If you are using this worship resource on your own, after making your list of prayer concerns, sit in silence and let your mind calm down. When you are ready, aloud or just in your own mind, ask God to bless each of the persons and situations on your list.
- End with the Lord's Prayer.

### **Closing Song – “Jesus Loves Me”**

*Jesus loves me, this I know. For the bible tells me so. Little ones to him belong. They are weak but he is strong. Yes, Jesus loves me (3 times). The bible tells me so.*

### **A Prayer of Benediction**

*May the God of peace be with you, stilling the heart that hammers with fear and doubt and confusion. And may the warm mantle of your peace cover those who are troubled and anxious. May the blessing of peace be on you and in you every moment of the week ahead. Amen.*

**TIME FOR JESUS CALLS!** In place of the social hour we all love so much, get yourself a cup of coffee or tea and make a few phone calls to folks who might just love to talk with someone right about now. You'll be glad you did, I'm sure. 😊